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## LATIN LITERATURE AS RELATED TO ROMAN BIRTH

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What do we really mean when we speak of "Roman literature"? Are we to narrow the term to literature produced by those actually born within the compass of the seven hills? The idea is not unbelievable; there are Englishmen still who resent the introduction of Poe and Hawthorne into the company of Shakespeare and Shelley. Urban is urban to them, and provincial, provincial.

Yet if we do so narrow our term, there is hardly anything left to us worth the forming of an estimate. From the six centuries, or a little more, between the First Punic War and the fall of the Western Empire, the names of some eighty authors of one sort or another have come down to us. Omitting dilettante emperors, dryly explanatory scientists, lawyers, unimportant war historians, church writers (who mark the beginning of mediaevalism), and the like, there are left forty-seven names which have some meaning to the ordinary student of Latin literature. Of these forty-seven, just six—about 12 per cent only—were born at Rome. The nativity of the other forty-one may be seen by reference to Tables A and B.

It may thus be observed that what we call Roman literature is, as I have intimated, in reality nearly all provincial—might, in fact, more justly be called Cisalpine Gallic. Italian it certainly is—53 per cent of it originated in Italy exclusive of Rome—but the city herself may well be ashamed of her showing.

It is true that in point of numbers she is second on the list; but a glance at Table C will dispel any illusions which that fact may engender. When it comes to a question of real eminence, of a genius sufficient to gain a place in world statistics, Rome falls to the sorry position of sixth by grace among nine, with exactly the same percentage as has the far-off province of Transalpine Gaul. As a matter of fact, just two great writers, Caesar and Lucretius,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> There is even a good deal of doubt in the case of Lucretius. But I think his case is sufficiently well established for us to include him in this premise.

TABLE A

	Rome	Southern Italy	Central Italy	Cisalpine Gaul	Transalpine Gaul	Spain	Greek Territory	Asia	Africa	Unknown
<b>I</b>										
<i>Pre-Ciceronian:</i>										
Cato.....	*	Rudiae,								
Ennius.....	...	Calabria								
Livius Andronicus.....	*						Tarentum			
Lucilius.....	*									
Naevius.....	*									
Plautus.....	...			Sarsina, Umbria					Carthage	
Terence.....	...									
<b>II</b>										
<i>Ciceronian:</i>										
Caesar.....	*									Rome?
Carus.....	...			Verona						
Catullus.....	...									
Cicero.....	...	Arpinum								Cisalpine Gaul or Rome
Chinia.....	...									
Lucretius.....	*			Hostilia, Venetia						
Nepos.....	...									
Publius Syrus.....	...							Antioch, Syria		
Sallust.....	...									
M. T. Varro.....	...		Amitemum							Rome?
P. T. Varro (Atacius).....	...				On the Aude, Provence					
<b>III</b>										
<i>Augustan:</i>										
Asinius Pollio.....	...	Abruzzi			Forum Iulii					
Gallus.....	...	Venusia,								
Horace.....	...	Apulia								
Livy.....	...			Padua, Venetia						
Ovid.....	...		Sulmo							
Phaedrus.....	...			Assisi (Merania, Umbria)			Thrace			
Propertius.....	...			Umbria						
Tibullus.....	...		Gabii							
Velleius Paterculus.....	*			Mantua						
Virgil.....	...			Lombardy						

[illegible]

were certainly born at Rome, and of these the former was chiefly renowned in another capacity. Here, as before, Cisalpine Gaul easily leads—90 per cent of her writers were possessed of something more than simple talent or accidental fame. Below Rome there

TABLE B

Period	Rome	S. Italy	C. Italy	C. Gaul	T. Gaul	Spain	Gr. Ter.	Asia	Africa	Un-known	Total of Periods
I.....	3	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	7
II.....	2	1	1	2	1	0	0	1	0	3	11 (8)
III.....	1	2	2	3	1	0	1	0	0	0	10
IV.....	0	0	0	1	0	3	0	0	0	1	5 (4)
V.....	0	1	1	3	0	2	0	0	0	2	9 (7)
VI.....	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	3 (2)
VII....	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	2
Total places	6	5	4	10	3	5	2	2	3	7	47 (40 without unknowns)

TABLE C

Period	Rome	S. Italy	C. Italy	C. Gaul	T. Gaul	Spain	Gr. Ter.	Asia	Africa	Un-known	Total of Periods
I.....	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	3
II.....	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
III.....	0	1	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
IV.....	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	1	4 (3)
V.....	0	0	1	3	0	2	0	0	0	0	6
VI.....	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2 (1)
VII....	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total..	2	3	3	9	1	4	0	0	2	2	26 (24)
Per-centage	33+	60	75	90	33+	80	0	0	66+	28+	55+ (60 without unknowns)

are only the Greek colonies and Asia, where Greek was the common tongue. (Those of unknown birth are, of course, not included in these estimates.)

A word here as to the tables. So far as possible, I have located the small Italian towns, grouping them as Southern Italy (Sicily to Campagna) and Central Italy (Latium to Umbria). Cisalpine Gaul is, of course, the modern Northern Italy. Where I have

used the names of districts, it has been the present Italian departments, which insure uniformity and have definite connotation for one who knows the country and its characteristics. Tarentum I have classed as Greek, although it was in Southern Italy: Greek was the language of the town even during the empire, and it seems never to have become latinized. In general, I have called towns by their Roman names: some larger cities, such as Bordeaux and Cadiz, I have given in their more familiar form.

Of the unknowns, Cinna was born either in Cisalpine Gaul, or, according to Lawton, in Rome; Calvus was probably, but not certainly, of Roman birth, as was also Marcus Tullius Varro; Athens has, without any degree of proof, been claimed as the birth-place of Aulus Gellius.<sup>1</sup> Since the author of the *Pervigilium Veneris* is unknown (I can find no authority for Pater's *Flavianus*, and presume that he is purely fanciful) his place of birth remains also in darkness; strictly speaking, he should not be admitted here; but the poem is too great a masterpiece to rest unnoticed. Its writer is as truly an individual personality as is any man I have mentioned. It is absolutely impossible to obtain any information as to Petronius and Suetonius: personally, I believe Petronius to have been a Roman by birth, but I have no proof at all in the matter. Niebuhr thinks that he dates as late as Septimius Severus or even the Gordians; but surely his letter to Nero should be sufficient proof of the absurdity of that statement.

Table B needs no comment; but I confess that I feel extremely diffident as to Table C. I have taken as the really great, Ennius, Plautus, Terence, Cicero, Caesar, Lucretius, Catullus, Virgil, Horace, Propertius, Tibullus, Ovid, Livy, Seneca, Lucan, Petronius, Persius, Martial, the Plinys, Quintilian, Tacitus, Juvenal, Apuleius, the author of the *Pervigilium Veneris*, and Ausonius. This is over 55 per cent of the whole; but a closer estimate I dared not make. I myself should confine the very greatest writers to ten—Cicero, Caesar, Lucretius, Catullus, Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Livy, Juvenal and Tacitus. But surely Plautus, if not Terence, has as good a right here as Ovid or Livy; and three of my own especial favorites,

<sup>1</sup> The inclusion of these names would not make the least addition to Roman eminence.

Propertius, Apuleius, and the author of the *Pervigilium* are omitted, to say nothing of Petronius and Suetonius. On the whole, Table C as given is safest, though a few explanations must still be made, as to perhaps unseemly *lacunae*.

Livius Andronicus owes his reputation rather to the fact that he is the first known writer in Latin than to any intrinsic merit. Naevius, although the fragments we possess of his work show a singular and haughty majesty, and though it is true that for a time after his death "obliti sunt Romai loquier lingua Latina," does not really belong in the same rank with the powerful and lucid Ennius. Cato was a writer of force and a somewhat narrow dignity; but it is as a writer that we least know him, and that he is least worthy of knowledge. Cornelius Nepos gives us an easily understandable Latin; but he has no great talent. Calvus, the "doctus poeta," we know only through extrinsic mention and criticism; and we can hardly exalt him to the highest rank on the word of his personal friends. The same may be said of Gallus. Suetonius is fascinating and valuable; but he would be the last to claim anything more than the position of a cultured and brilliant gossip of the court. Claudianus, like Livius Andronicus, owes his fame to his position—this time the melancholy one of the last of the pagan authors. If some names perhaps expected are entirely absent—such as Hirtius, Silius Italicus, Eutropius, the authors of the *Bellum civile* and the *Historiae Augustae*—I can only plead, as in all this part of my work, a personal and therefore fallible judgment.

As has been seen, then, the great bulk of the so-called Roman writers were provincials; it is worth our while, however, to discover to what extent they felt themselves citizens of the city or of their native towns; and to what extent also they displayed the characteristics of the locality which gave them birth.

The lapses from the original Greek allusions in Plautus are purely Roman—a reference, for instance, to the Tarpeian Rock, or the Capitoline Jove. Terence, more polished and more impersonal than the "flat-footed" Umbrian, displays such slips much more rarely; an allusion to a Roman law or a gladiatorial combat, perhaps, but nothing more. Certainly there is nothing to call the mind to Carthage.

When we come to the Ciceronian age, matters change. Cicero speaks frequently of Arpinum. Catullus chose most of his friends from among trans-Padines. Varro Atacinus utterly ignored Rome to write of his loved Moselle, as David Gray of the Luggie. Publius Syrus gained his name from his birthplace.

In the Augustan age, Virgil's *Eclogues* give us the country of Lombardy rather than that of the Campagna; and if his alleged epitaph be not spurious, Mantua was his first thought when he lay near death. Horace's Sabine farm is as famous as Cicero's villas; in his allusions to his father, he shows sometimes a feeling almost as filial for his native town. I do not think it only fancy which traces in Tibullus and Propertius a country background not Roman; and the mere fact that so much of Tibullus' scenery especially is rural, points to origin in a village. Ovid, who has told us more about himself than any other of these men, is eager to avow his nativity: "Sulmo mihi patria est." Livy's provincialism was so marked that by it he gained the epithet "Patavinus," just as the elegant Petronius was nicknamed "Arbiter."

When we come to the Spaniards, the subjective feeling of difference from the Romans is still more marked. Seneca not only took an interest in his native Corduba, but sent for and almost adopted his nephew Lucan. Martial even went back to Babilis, though, to tell the truth, he was bored to death there. To return to Italy, Juvenal (in all probability it was the poet himself) dedicated a tablet at Aquinum. Apuleius' style is unmistakably African; Ausonius is practically a Frenchman in feeling.

Many of these men needed no avowal or profession to proclaim their origin. Plautus, Livy, Juvenal: there is a sort of family likeness in them, which becomes heavy-handed humor in the first, sober conscientiousness in the second, moral indignation in the last. Cornelius Nepos, Persius, the Plinys—they, too, are all Northern Italians, with that touch of rustic stolidity that may reveal itself as painstaking history or science, patient academic satire, or cold impersonality (as in the rather despicable younger Pliny). Propertius and Catullus are "sports," in the botanical sense, as are all poets who die too young: each poured out his life in a tragic passion, wasted on a light and worthless woman; each lived the feverish



days of a debauched high society; and if the possession of perhaps the greatest genius of any recorded here will not excuse Catullus' divergence from type, then let us remember that he was born in the city of Rome.

The three greatest of the Spaniards—Seneca, Lucan, and Martial—might be natives of Madrid today. Trucklers to the high and mighty, boastfully proud, but cowards under pressure, ready to turn state's evidence for an inducement: they represent all the worst traits of Spanish character; but they have, too, the Spaniard's quick wit, his fiery ardor, his perfect urbanity.

The partial explanation of a good deal of the foregoing characterization depends, it is true, on the passing of time. The harsh and rude Latin of Livius Andronicus and Naevius gradually gained polish, until it "o'erleaped itself, and fell on the other" side. Still, it is more than mere coincidence that suddenly brought into prominence in the time of Nero a group of brilliant Spanish writers, who rushed like a meteor through the sky of Latin literature, without predecessors or successors; that gave birth to an entire African school, florid and sonorous, which culminated in the Latin writers of Christianity; that little by little widened the provincial horizon, until after the accession of Augustus not a single writer of Roman birth appears except the insignificant Velleius Paterculus, and after him not one. Even the prolific and indefatigable Cisalpine Gaul—in fact, *all Italy*—becomes silent after Hadrian; and what writing there is is being done in Transalpine Gaul, Asia, and Africa. But, allowing for all the changes in government; the accessions of imperial property, bringing hitherto foreign lands into the empire; external and particularly Greek influences (the "Graeculus esuriens" came in when the Graecus went out); the distractions of civil war: accounting for *everything*, yet the absolute literary poverty of the city of Rome remains pitifully evident.

What was the cause of that poverty? Was Rome incapable of independent literary achievement? Was her genius wholly military and political? That is the common answer: but the fact that two such writers as Caesar and Lucretius sprang from her loins is sufficient proof that Rome could well mother a literary genius. It was not for nothing that the Latin written by these two is the

purest in existence. Was it that she gave her attention to a foreign language and literature to the exclusion and detriment of her own? Hardly that, for the great writers of Greek under the Roman dominion—men like Plutarch and Lucian—were born in Greek countries, ignorant of Latin; and the fashion which arose in the later empire of preferring the older to the newer tongue, so that Marcus Aurelius, for instance wrote almost entirely in Greek, came too late to have any influence on a final result. The true answer lies, I think, in an inspection from another point of view of Table A.

The Roman authors given there are, a dramatist, producing *fabulae togatae* and tragedy of the old school; a writer of treatises; a satirist; two military historians (with apologies to Caesar for the company in which he is thus put); and a didactic poet. Let us turn now to Cisalpine Gaul, the most prolific of the provinces. Here we find, again, a comedian and a minor historian, belonging, like those of Rome, to an early period, when the city was still the great and dominant influence: but then come the finest lyrists of Latin literature; its greatest epic poet; its best elegist; its first constructive historian; two satirists in the later style, one of them the greatest of all; its best scientific writer (so good that I have included him here); and its most polished letter-writer after Cicero.

Here is the crux of the matter. The Roman character was inherently didactic: Cato, Lucilius, Lucretius, felt their convictions heavy upon them and were impelled to proselyte their world. It is the accident of a mighty genius that made of Lucretius' defense of Epicureanism a sublime philosophy expressed in a noble and sometimes an almost godlike form. Even to those who cannot agree with Lucretius' views, his poem has a peculiarly majestic impressiveness; to those few of us who are his disciples, it bears a glory almost of divinity. Didactic, however, it essentially and unalterably is.

There are left only Caesar and Naevius; for every age and every land has its Velleius Paterculus. Caesar, I think we may grant, would have written well in Choctaw. It is my belief that there was little typically Roman about his genius; that, however, is a matter for consideration and discussion elsewhere. In any event the general inclination of his writing is toward the group just

mentioned; it is necessarily argumentative and didactic from the very character of his subject and the peculiarity of his position at the time. Naevius represents the second impulse of early Latin literature, the tendency toward realistic comedy—for realism, as in the eighteenth century in England and the nineteenth in France, always accompanies a didactic and rationalistic attitude. Yet from another aspect he gives also the key to the decline of the really Roman literature; for nearly all his comedies are translations or adaptations from the Greek.

That Greek impulse, which checked before maturity all the Roman tendencies and adaptabilities; which turned the minds of the Romans toward polish on the one hand, and lyric emotion on the other; which made invectives of the satires, epics of the didactic poems, elegies of the rustic choruses, utterly changed the trend of Roman writing. It was analogous to the forcing of our civilization upon the negroes. The Romans never had a chance to develop their own natural bent, but were forced to adopt instead an alien style and viewpoint.

But, unfortunately, the Roman mind was unbending and hard to change; it was one thing to bring the horse to water, via the Greek colonies of Southern Italy, and quite another thing to make him drink. He hobbled along for a while, and then dropped by the wayside: and the rest of Italy took up his burden.

For, by some strange unlikeness which makes us almost believe in the Trojan legend, the genius of exterior Italy, especially to the north in Cisalpine Gaul, was quite capable of absorbing and incorporating with itself the new hellenized Latin literature which Rome could no longer expound. For a while the two—Rome and the rest of Italy—went side by side; then Cisalpine Gaul, Southern Italy, and even the country around Rome gradually gained upon the mother city; until finally when Spain and Transalpine Gaul and Asia and Africa became capable of taking up the burden and the glory, they found ready for them a full-grown literature, splendidly Italian, but having little in common with Rome itself except its language. The connecting link was the country around the capital, from which came Sallust, Tibullus, Ovid, and Tacitus; but there

is significance in the fact that the glory of Rome is Caesar and Lucretius, that of Cisalpine Gaul, Virgil and Catullus.

There is, of course, another connection: every one of these men lived in Rome, took part in her affairs, knew her thoroughly; some, like Cicero, are vitally connected with her history. But they are nevertheless provincials, who took their literary bent from some obscure parent in Umbria or Apulia.

It may be said, finally, that all this discussion is a curiosity of worthless pedantry; that it leads to nothing and has no practical bearing, since Rome nevertheless was "mistress and mother" of the world, and could claim as her own whatever her children brought to her feet. That is true; and yet there is much in Latin literature, as related to and alienated from Roman life and thought, that can be explained only by this remarkable paradox. As the iron walls of empire fell, and objects could be seen in their nakedness, the real trend of Latin literature after that first frustrated spring became manifest. In such poems as the *Pervigilium Veneris*, in prose like that of Apuleius, we have the forerunners and the faint prophecy of the literature of the Romance countries of today.